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- **Abstract**

This paper explores the current state of affairs within the Euro-Atlantic region, with particular emphasis in understanding the ongoing transformations of NATO and the effects of the Sino Russian meteoric rise to world powers status on the West. This paper aims to clarify the primary power shift mechanics and shed light upon the trend that disruptive emerging threats will follow in the next ten years. The dawn of the new decade hints towards several sectorial transformations of the political, economic and security dimensions. The accelerated technological innovations, regional economic crisis, rising authoritarian powers and world economic asymmetries, contribute today for the transformation of tomorrow’s world order. NATO, as the most enduring shield of western democracies, continue to face today an increasing challenge to adapt to rising threats. Consequently, it is the first objective of this paper to uncover the essential factors conditioning the ongoing world geopolitical dynamics and its impact in the West and particularly in NATO. Secondly, it focuses on the multiple new emerging challenges to the Alliance, and how NATO should adapt in order to cope with the threats of the upcoming decade. The paper argues for a role shift of the Alliance towards an international actor with global ‘dual-track’ responsibility, i.e. to continue ensuring the defence of the Allied Members and deterrence of threats, but at the same time, serving as a democratic agent to promote and sponsor global stability. As a result, this work recommends for a more substantial relationship architecture between NATO and the E.U.

- **Keywords:** NATO, European Union, Atlantic Bond, Global Economy, Emerging Challenges, Hybrid Warfare.

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Paper

NATO CHALLENGES FOR 2030

1. The Strategic Context and Essential Conditioning Factors

1.1. The erosion of the USA

Several factors have led to the complicated and dangerous current situation, substantially impacting and conditioning our collective future. The most visible is the exhaustion of the ‘unipolar moment’, associated with the profound political erosion of the USA in the International Arena.

For three decades, the USA has been assuming high costs to guarantee access to the common goods of humankind and in particular, protecting the freedom of sea and air navigation, essential to international trade. Naturally, in their benefit, but also the interest of all parties.

Its military might is repeatedly and systematically involved in multiple interventions. The collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the strategic reflux of the Soviet Union that followed it, left vast empty spaces where conflicts previously unsolved but frozen due to bipolar restraint, broke out. Hence, the arc of violent crises of the 90s rose from Algeria, to Egypt and to the Western Balkans threatening the stability of Europe, which was unable to resolve it. Despite some initial reluctance, the U.S. accepted to head the diplomatic action in Bosnia-Herzegovina that led to the Dayton Agreement and intervened, under NATO’s framework, with massive forces to implement it.

Having lost ‘the enemy’ and the Alliance’s *raison d’être*, and in the face of a rapidly evolving world, the allies accepted ‘out of area operations’ as a necessity to maintain a meaningful purpose. Moreover, it was mainly due to the American initiative and its substantial involvement that NATO triggered, within the limits of its jurisprudence, an air intervention over Serbia and Kosovo.

In reality, the end of the last century, which was believed to be the harbinger of a ‘New World Order’ based on the U.N. charter and values, continued to be flagged by multiple U.S. interventions. Kissinger (2001) wondered whether America required a coherent Foreign Policy, given these interventions without a reliable and preconceived plan or Strategy. It was already evident at that time the growing distance between the shores of the Atlantic. Kissinger much valued this strategic space, which is ground of shared historical and cultural values and whose secular relationship led to the development of a ‘community of destiny’ that he foresaw in drift, but that should be defended and safeguarded. To this end, he considered the creation of an essential ‘*Steering Committee*’, grouping all European countries, the USA and Canada, which would serve

as the source of a collective and in-depth political dialogue. Kissinger also proposed the establishment of a common economic space much like what the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) might have been. Despite what we know today, and given the foreseeable near-future context, we consider Kissinger's proposal even more relevant to cope with the current political and strategic situation, as we will explain below.

The 9/11 demonstrated the vulnerability of the United States. Attacked in their territory, they answered with the "war on terror". A unilateralist inclination to discover the 'paradox of American power' which, unequalled in capabilities, failed to impose order in the new age of transnational and asymmetric threats. This American posture followed the most prolonged external interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, among others, which have led to a profound human, moral, economic and social strain.

According to the Watson Institute ("Costs of War", 2020), the financial costs in the post 9/11 period reached up to 6.4 trillion USD, which sums up to roughly two 'Silk Roads'. But with opposite consequences. The Silk Road is, in practice, reshaping the global economic relational framework led by China. The American interventions may end shineless and without glory for the USA, as the leading role in the region is falling into the hands of Russia, Turkey and Iran, which seek to emerge as promoters of peace and stability in the area.

With rising foreign debts, profound nation wear and with a very divided society, in which the middle class felt forgotten, the USA now needs its recovery time. Far from continuing to intend to affirm his country as the world's 'indispensable nation', President Obama, in 2016, stated that the moment for the American 'nation-building' had finally arrived.

1.2. The rise of China and its partnership with Russia

The US-China relationship will surely be at the centre of world geopolitics in the current century. The common perception is that China's continued rise is altering the balance of power in the world order. Moreover, China's rise takes place in an increasingly close partnership with Russia, which limits the options for balancing the global geopolitical scenario.

The rapprochement between China and Russia began in 1996. Russia, going through an economic debacle and feeling betrayed by the lack of Western support, approached China by reversing the disagreements that had come from Mao. China was more than ready. They knew about the 'strategic miracle' of Central Asia's natural and energy resources uncovered with the collapse of the USSR and the independence of local countries, despite having border problems with almost all of them. In order to solve these issues and get closer to the so desired resources, China needed the collaboration of Russia, which maintained significant investments and strong local influence. It was under this context of partnership that China solved its border problems and formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, exclusive to Asian countries, which today

involves almost half of the world population (Menges, 2005, p.340). Also, enabling the foundation of the new Silk Road (the One Belt One Road Initiative), which, allows access by land and sea not only to Central Asian reserves but also to consumption and production centres in Europe and the Middle East, substantially reducing transport costs and response times. At the same time, China drastically reduced its dependence, hitherto absolute, on the circulation across the Straits of Malacca and it allowed them to use the redundant industrial and business surpluses given the reduction in international demand.

China's economic growth was considered a strong indicator and premise for the establishment of a more open and free society. However, this resulted in an exclusivist and authoritarian reinforcement of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Following a deterministic historical perspective, China has re-affirmed the belief in the West's irreversible decay (particularly since the 2008's crisis), and the modernisation of China as an inevitable trend in history. Wang Yi, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs' public statement at the Munich Security Conference on February 15 2020, regarding the reaction to the Covid-19 crisis, underlined "[t]he high speed and massive scale of China's response is unique in the world. China's speed, scale and efficiency all demonstrate the strengths of China's system." (ChinaDaily, 2020). This perspective attests that the crisis response narrative was already in place. It reflected a posture of an ideological competition increasingly served by powerful propaganda means and when necessary, by internal conditioning pressures and coercion to overcome less cooperative attitudes (Diamond, 2020), which was widely reported (Ferguson, 2020).

China's affirmation has also been extending to the strategic environment. Traditionally organised in highly autonomous Services in which the supremacy of land forces was decisive, the Chinese armed forces were restructured according to the most operational model of Combined Arms and constant and indeed transformative reinforcement of their naval capacity. At the 2012 CCP Congress, Hu Jintao called for China to become a 'maritime power', which represents a strategic change from the history of an admittedly continental "Middle Kingdom". According to the ChinaPower Project (2020), in 2018 President Xi Jinping reinforced this position introducing a tone of urgency: "the task of building a powerful navy has never been as urgent as it is today".

The year 2019 marked a quantitative change with a demonstrative and profound psychological effect. The Chinese navy surpassed the 300 warships mark, having overcome the USA (Mizokami, 2020). A carefully choreographed naval parade presided over by President Xi Jinping was broadcast to the world. Of course, it is far from the tonnage, operational capacity and power projection of the USA. However, for the first time in modern history, the Chinese have more capacity to 'occupy' maritime space. While the development of sophisticated anti-ship and anti-access missiles poses deadly challenges to the American aircraft carriers. Between 2014 and 2018 alone, China launched more submarines, warships, amphibian, and auxiliary vessels than the total number of ships in service in the navies of Germany, India, Spain, and the United Kingdom. If the production of the seven naval shipyards for the navy continues, China could effectively reach the thousands of warships planned for the middle of the century.

China's naval operations have been following an alarming trend. Since 2015, joint naval exercises have initiated with Russia, and have come closer to the West ever since. In 2017, the Sino-Russian partnership exercised jointly in sensitive waters where they had never cooperated before, namely in the Baltic Sea and north of the Japanese islands of Hokkaido in the Okhotsk Sea, while in the same year they carried out other exercises in the Mediterranean but with live-fire. Most significantly, in December 2019 China participated in a joint naval exercise with Russia and Iran in the Gulf of Hormuz and the Indian Ocean, at a susceptible time in that critical region. The Iranian press considered them the "new triangle of power at sea" (France24, 2020).

2. NATO's Global Positioning

The most fundamental challenge to NATO today concerns the redefinition of its 'Purpose'. The mission to defend against Russian aggression seems short to fully engage the United States when it is China that is emerging as a conditioning power to global affairs and redefining future strategic relations. Neither does it appear to be due to the public threat to China that NATO's political valorisation is stimulated. On the contrary, the current geostrategic context undoubtedly recommends for a discreet work of alignment of interests between the two sides of the Atlantic.

Therefore, in this text, we argue for a return to the spirit of the 'Harmel Report' (NATO, 1967) and the 'dual-track'. Placing a strong defence and deterrence at the centre of the Alliance's strategic concept paves the way for the possibility of political dialogue, *à détente* and towards a more cooperative approach to security issues with Russia.

Today's NATO needs to be repositioned on the world stage to fulfil its mission. Nevertheless, for that, it is essential to rebuild the transatlantic unit – the centre of gravity – which will go through the deepening of mutual relations. Supported by shared contemporary interests and reinforced by a specific and permanent structure for political dialogue (*like a Steering Committee*) further enhances the analysis of shared political interests and the alignment of guidelines that preserve the unity of democracies. It is essential not to forget that Portugal, eccentric in Europe, is central to NATO and the Atlantic bond. Hence, if anyone is interested in expressing this need, that country is Portugal.

2.1. Strengthening the Atlantic Bond in a more Central NATO

We seem to be currently walking with our eyes closed for the tragic repetition of history. Graham Allison (2017) argues that the biggest challenge for this generation is to prevent China and the United States from falling into the 'Thucydides trap'. In the past 500 years, 12 out of 16 times in which an emerging power challenged the dominant state, it resulted in war. The risk is high, and we believe that the necessary process of managing disagreements with China, should

take place in a political dialogue supported by a reinforced Atlantic Bond. This formula also applies to the NATO Global Partnership members, such as Australia, South Korea or Japan. Alone, Europe is now considered just a ‘competition area’ among the great powers. Together with the USA, Europe can assert itself as a balancing, normative and pacifying agent. For the USA, Europe, due to real and effective participation in NATO, can and should be a shield that gives the time frame needed for America to compose itself. Only this function has a real geostrategic interest for the USA.

NATO cannot become solely ‘US-dependent’, in what is today generally considered, an unbalanced organisation. In other words, Europe, with a GDP similar to that of the USA, remains a military dwarf and eternally dependent. If Europe, as the NATO’s European Pillar, does not bring more capabilities to the Alliance and assumes greater responsibility for its security, and the peripheral stability of the region which includes at least the Sahel and the Middle East, NATO will always be seen as a ‘bad deal’. More and more voices in the USA¹ consider NATO of less importance compared to the initial concept approved by the American Congress in 1948, that considered the “emergence of a hegemonic power in Eurasia” as the central reason for the constitution of a transatlantic Alliance (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 82). Today’s Russia is a regional economic power with a GDP similar to that of Italy, unable to carry out the indispensable economic restructuring without undoing the regime. For many Americans, this alone does not justify the substantial commitment of the USA.

Despite the disinvestment of the USA from European interests, and given the evermore assertive China in the geopolitical arena, the main challenge NATO faces today is one of Purpose. A joint counter-action appears to take shape, as on June 6 2020, the European Commission publicly and nominally denounced China and Russia for the disinformation campaign on Covid-19, which was considered to weaken Western democracies purposely and to sow internal divisions following a *modus operandi* comparable to that of a hybrid war.

In the USA, the Congress has developed a bipartisan approach on the need to react to China, to which the Administration has joined, probably seeking to set the stage, with the approval of the ‘United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China’ in May 2020.

This is the Administration’s first detailed Strategy on the new stance towards China, out of which it is important to highlight three aspects. The most crucial factor is that being a more robust Strategy than the ‘E.U.’s Strategic Outlook’ of March 2019, it is mostly compatible with it; it does not aim to ‘contain’ the development of China, nor to distance itself from the Chinese people but to protect the vital interests of the USA and its allies and partners; it also adopts a ‘competitive

¹ Among other voices, Mearsheimer and Walt (2016, p. 82) propose that the US “end” its military presence in Europe and “hand over NATO to Europeans”. In a remarkable book, Barry Posen (2014, p.166-167) proposes a “Restriction” stance for the USA, based on a Naval Strategy supported by a strong Navy, with few occupied bases, a long-range Air Force and the ability to promote coalitions in the face of unfavourable circumstances. For that, the United States needs “real allies, not security dependents like it has today”.

approach' based on China's actions and intentions in which it will accept 'greater tolerance for bilateral frictions'; and, finally, this Strategy intends to establish a fair competition with China, welcoming cooperation where interests are aligned. The main question now is to define the acceptable limit for those bilateral frictions, and to what extent that friction does not become self-degenerative (U.S. National Security Council, 2020).

Given this particular context, we argue in favour of the political reinforcement of NATO. With the creation of an *individual body in the Atlantic Council*, like the Defence Plans Committee in the 1970s, was set up to deal specifically with the nuclear issue when France withdrew from the integrated military structure. Today, when seeking to strengthen NATO politically, it would be useful to constitute a new body in the North Atlantic Council, which could be called the *Political Analysis Council*, neutral in tone and which could be positioned above the present military geostrategic rationality.

So that NATO could assert itself as an Alliance destined to promote global security and world peace, it should consider the constitution of a '*NATO – China Council*', parallel to that of the frozen '*NATO – Russia Council*'. In this way, NATO could become the central Alliance for the establishment of World political dialogue in the 21st century.

NATO cannot help but be continually adapting to the world around it. In the current strategic context, the unification of Eurasia is taking place within the framework of the Sino-Russian partnership. Due to its inequality, this partnership has been of concern in several Russian sectors. *The rapprochement between NATO and Russia* could be viewed as advantageously by both parties. Such stabilising approach could start with a more in-depth dialogue on energy security, terrorism and in particular, on arms control and the nuclear agenda.

An openly political stance could help to construct a bridge to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that includes, in addition to Russia and China, Iran, India and Pakistan and other important Central Asian countries. If the Geopolitical Centre moved to the East, this connection is imperative. Then, in a second phase beyond the connection, one could think about establishing systematic political dialogue and consultation, creating a structure that is similar to the NATO-Russia Council. To ignore this organisation is to turn a blind eye to the future, allowing the Silk Road to monopolise the strategic space and to accept the Asianization of Eurasia. To avoid this and to present an alternative for the region, the E.U. approved in May, last year its 'New E.U. strategy on Central Asia'.

To fit the Alliance in an exclusively military defence posture is to ignore the adversaries' capacity for intrusion into the 'western fortress' and the emergence of new forms of coercion, which reaction cannot be short from political and multisectoral. In a predictable century of major political and military transformations, marked by the growing influence of autocratic powers, it becomes vital to reinforce the dual nature of NATO - in defence of allied democracies; and in the

creation of a climate of stability and cooperation, based on the integrity of the Euro-Atlantic-Asian area.

In the framework of transatlantic relations, we believe that the most important bilateral relationship in the world is measured in terms of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The E.U. and the USA are natural structural partners and the major economic powers in the world. According to Statista Inc. (2020, July) over 70% of Europe's FDI is made in the USA and 60% of the US FDI is made in Europe. Its interconnection has been steadily growing, summing up to a total of 3.6 trillion USD and millions of jobs in 2018. However, this fundamental geo-economic capacity remains without political management and is remembered only by the exceptions that fail to do well. The appreciation of this immense geo-economic capacity, sooner than later, has to be re-evaluated.

2.2. A new arrangement of NATO-EU relations

Fabrice Pothier (2019) argues that it seems ironic that NATO has received a new breath of life for having returned to its original mission: the defence of Allied territory. A few years ago, it would seem unlikely that NATO would be able to take the deterrent measures towards Russia after the invasion of Ukraine and greater military assertiveness in the Baltic countries. However, the Alliance not only constituted new multinational units on the immediate periphery of Russia but also prompted the return of American ground combat units to Europe, the last of which had left the continent during Obama's presidency. The NATO Rapid Reaction Force has quadrupled, and the allied air and naval presence in the Black and Baltic Sea leaves no room for doubt as to the full commitment to the defence of the Allies in light of Article 5.

The 'paradox' is that NATO's response is given above all at the level of conventional means. At the same time, the Russian (and Chinese) campaign to divide Europe and separate it from the USA is taking place mainly in the area of economics, disinformation, social unrest, the enticement of unaligned groups and political parties, all elaborated in a well-orchestrated hybrid warfare campaign in which non-military actions have a decisive impact.

The closer relation that NATO and the E.U. have been substantiating leads us to consider that a new level of functional cooperation between them is indispensable so that it is possible to articulate, in the reaction to today's threats, Europe's unique capabilities (diplomatic, financial and legal and social) with the classic (political, strategic, military and intelligence) of NATO.

We, therefore, argue in favour of the development of Integrated Action Campaigns, both for the reaction to hybrid threats of a multisectoral nature that the current situation unavoidably recommends and for external crisis management operations in which the harmonious operational integration of civil and military skills makes it ever more determinant. The integrated actions could be carried out either by campaigns that are operationally articulated and conducted separately or

by *fully integrated joint and combined actions*. We believe that this practice would avoid many of the difficulties and suspicions that repeatedly emerge in the interrelationship between the E.U. and NATO.

This would in no way conflict with the E.U.'s strategic autonomy, which we consider essential to promote Europe's legitimate interests. Moreover, this would serve as a safety-net for the Eurocentric nations, whenever the Alliance, as a whole, would not intend to commit itself. Nor should this affect the process of European capabilities building within the specific frameworks of the Permanent Structured Cooperation and the Defence Fund, given that the long-identified European needs have to be addressed.

Hence, leading us to the essential need *to achieve NATO-EU complementarity and prevent unnecessary duplication of capacities*. This could be achieved through the common sharing of STANAGs and STANRECs² as a rule, the exception being restricted to specific E.U. issues. For the development of integrated or integrable communications systems and, above all, for a planning and capacity building process closely coordinated between the 'NATO Defence Planning Process' and the E.U.' Coordinated Annual Defence Review' or similar process. The deepening of these relations also involves an improved sharing of information and the early coordination of capabilities development projects to be established between the NATO HQ Defence Investment Division and the E.U. correspondents, namely the newly created General Directorate for Space and the Defence of Europe and the European Defence Agency. It seems equally important to create a working group between the NATO Investment Division, the corresponding E.U. structures and the private or public industrial sector, to mitigate the duplication of capacities and implement the aforementioned STANAGs in the military industry. This working group would have the function of facilitating the implementation of national capacities, especially those shared between NATO and the E.U.

2.3. The Alliance's Cohesion

The Alliance's cohesion is the vital centre of gravity for NATO which needs to be strengthened through the reinforcement of the consultations at the Political, Strategic and Tactical level, in the light of the Treaty itself.

In this sense, deepening political and strategic consensus is vital in three significant areas: 1) in increasing or expanding the sharing of strategic information; 2) to reinforce the development of collaborative and 'Smart Defence'³ programmes and to increase the interoperability of armaments, under the direction of the Capability Development Executive Board (CDEB) and politically

² Standardization Agreements and Standardization Recommendations.

³ 'Smart Defence' is a model of capability development used by NATO, where several nations come together to develop in cooperation one specific set of capabilities in the most economical way possible. See more at NATO ("Smart Defence", 2017).

managed by the Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD); 3) in making the political consultation more flexible concerning new issues of strategic-political background, such as the defence of cyberspace and the first NATO Space Policy, a sensitive issue that needs further political consultation.

During this century, the protection and defence of Space will assert itself fundamental for the defence of the Allied States. Not only due to the countless economies that depend on Space services, or the new normality of the easy orbital access that the private industries provide to new Space actors, but above all else, due to the emerging and unexplored geostrategy of orbital mechanisms, the key to 1) protect orbital access through efficient and safe trajectories; 2) ensuring the correct synchronisation of strategic, tactical and operational images in support of the command and control, joint fires and the armed forces' joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities in all operational domains (land, sea, air and cyberspace); 3) deterring adversaries from projecting force or destroying allied capacity in this 'domain of domains'.

By applying Alfred T. Mahan's 'Command of the Sea' and Sir Halford Mackinder's 'World Islands' respective theories of power, to the Space race, one may grasp the profound implications underlying global freedom. If autocratic powers triumph in obtaining a monopoly over spatial access resources or in other words – 'Space Control'. According to Everett Dolman's (2002, p.8) axiom, "Who controls low-earth orbit controls near-Earth Space. Who controls near-Earth Space dominates Terra. Who dominates Terra determines the destiny of humankind."

In order to prepare for the future of multidimensional defence, NATO has the challenge of designing and adapting its planning and operational execution to the unique characteristics of the space domain. It must also develop techniques, tactics and procedures necessary for the success of the Allied missions in a degraded, disputed or even denied Space operational theatre. It is therefore essential that the Allies work in a voluntary and coordinated manner, sharing information, so that the political decision-making process takes place in the fastest and most informed way, ensuring that space interoperability can be an attainable goal in the near future.

In this new frontier, the Alliance must seek to assume itself as *primus inter pares*, promoting the *creation of an international council that regulates and actively monitors the use of Space and its militarisation*, assuming as its core mission the defence of the free access and usage of Space as a 'Province of Humanity', as declared in 1967 by the Outer Space Treaty. With regard to the future of the Allied Space Operations, Portugal must emphasise the centrality of its role. With a unique Atlantic geography, Portugal benefits from unparalleled conditions for strategic orbital access and fast deployment. The location and security of the Azores archipelago, as well as the size of the Portuguese continental shelf, provide optimum conditions for the expansion of infrastructure essential *to the creation of a 'NATO Space Operations Centre'* (or command). In 2019, Portugal took the first step in this direction, creating its space footprint through the foundation of its National Space Agency – 'Portugal Space', with headquarters on the island of

Santa Maria and responsible for developing the technical capabilities necessary for the creation of the first mid-Atlantic Space Port.

Rare are the cases in which NATO has collectively acquired military capabilities. The organisation's 70 years of history and multiple executed operations demonstrate that the member states continue to be the prominent patrons of Allied military capabilities. The immediate future of NATO's space operations, should not differ from the past, as it most likely will involve individual national efforts to develop space key capabilities. If this is the case, a window of strategic opportunity opens up *for Portugal to assert itself as an actor in the military space economy of 'upstream and downstream' services*⁴.

The impending growing importance of Space and other new threats led NATO to expand the Emerging Challenges Division, with the creation of a new unit dedicated to Technological Innovations, which could be the receptacle of the cooperation (NATO-EU), outlining the suitable options of future systems to be developed.

The Alliance's cohesion also goes through the NAC consensus decision-making process, emphasising the political cohesion and the determination of the democratic peoples in seeking to defend Allied interests and territories. The 'open door' policy to new member states is also a relevant measure for the continual rapprochement and democratic cohesion of the North Atlantic region. Its implementation must, however, be considered with a great sense of opportunity, to avoid internal fractures. At the strategic level, NATO's cohesion is reinforced by the shared implementation of deterrence measures and by the active participation of member states in Allied operations and joint high-visibility exercises, as well as by the systematic and timely conduct of Strategic Communications campaigns based on a joint narrative, decentralised, but not fractured; at the tactical level, NATO must continue efforts to increase interoperability of capacities between member states. This interoperability, although of a technical nature, has strategic-political implications and therefore, underpins the Alliance's technical-operational cohesion and oiled smooth functioning. Throughout this process, the European component of the Alliance must be able to captivate and maintain the North American interest in participation and inclusion.

As we have repeatedly argued before, the Alliance's cohesion and resilience must go through the strategic harmonisation and functional cooperation with the European Union.

2.4. Security concerns with other States and non-State Actors

⁴ The space economy is divided into two major service sectors. The 'upstream sector' concerns space exploration and the launching and delivery of cargo into space, the main players in this sector are national and international space agencies. It is also associated with all the technology and infrastructure necessary to place objects in orbit. The 'downstream sector' encompasses all telecommunications and meteorology services based on space capabilities. Its main players are the private companies that explore space communications. It is also associated with the investigation research of data collected from upstream operations, and the development of satellites or orbital observatories.

Despite the concepts of ‘Comprehensive Approach’ and the evoked 360-degrees security approach, the most evident security concerns for NATO are echoed in the last series of the Trident exercises. NATO appears focused on near-peer adversaries and emerging challenges scenarios where Article 5 is activated, specifically in the ‘Juncture, Javelin and Jupiter” exercises. We believe that despite this demonstration of concern dictated by the geostrategic reality, Africa and in particular the Sahel region continues to be a permanent demographic bomb, largely ignored. It is imperative to place a strong emphasis on stabilising this region, one of the most insecure in the world and in the close vicinity of Europe. Despite the vision of recent years that recognised the strategic need to articulate a multisectoral and large-scale action in the region, the preference of the strategic focus of the Alliance seems to have returned to the Eurasian battlespace. A region where the Allied mobilisation efforts are almost total.

The Atlantic Area is another geography to be explored as it is closely related to NATO’s *raison d’être*. In this particular geostrategic setting, NATO must have greater participation in the maritime security, contributing to the Atlantic energy security and protection of its environment, further *extending its operations to the Gulf of Guinea region* and, as far as possible, to the South Atlantic.

Technological developments and further incorporation of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) in the activities of the Alliance must be studied and emphasised, with a broad scope of cooperation between the various NATO agencies, mainly NCIA, NC3A HQ and STO, with their respective E.U. homologous. At the same level of priority, NATO needs to create and protect future military datasets, foundations of the A.I. ecosystems, with multiple applications across the effort of war, modelling, simulation and exercising.

The rise of authoritarian powers in cyberspace is a topic of discussion at NATO today, and it will inevitably become a prominent field of work in the coming decades. China, Russia and some countries in the Middle East use the internet and the cyberspace as a tool to control and shape opinions, winning ‘hearts and minds’ at a low cost. The lessons learned from the Vietnam War are still alive, and the Allies know that they will have to act as a collective, to protect the ‘space of perceptions’. The Alliance must maintain a more active and proactive strategic communication strategy, resetting the narrative in a way that it reaches and touches the almost 1 billion citizens of the Euro-Atlantic area, denouncing the lies and effectively support the fight on this front. NATO must continue to guarantee and transmit to its citizens the confidence in the security it produces. ‘Transparency, fidelity and truth of the facts’, are the golden rules to be observed in the ‘battle of the narrative’ against the adversary disinformation campaign.

To protect freedom, democracy and the rule of law, it is essential that the U.S. and the E.U. adopt collective positions in response to the challenges of the next decade. From hypersonic missiles to quantum computing, through ‘drone swarms’, and ‘blockchain-based cryptography’, NATO is bound to transform itself once again. Global warming, environmental severe accidents and pandemics are agents that can weaken the Alliance’s cohesion and resilience, fracturing friendships and opening vulnerabilities where they should exist none. NATO must be prepared to

reinvent itself, looking for multisectoral intervention mechanisms, since collective defence is also an expression of contemporary political, social and economic needs that today have different values from those of 1949.

The variable of physical and temporal space has always been and will continue to be vital for the Allies. However, while China draws strategic plans over a time horizon beyond 100+ years, NATO, characterised by its heavy and slow institutional machine, plans at three short time horizons: for the immediate, 15 years and more than 30. Although it is challenging to plan collectively for more than half a century, profound reflection is needed on the strategic commitment of NATO and its Allies on the protection, not just of the physical integrity of national borders, nor of its historical heritage, but above all on the defence of a viable, free and democratic future.

Conclusive Remarks

To maintain its usefulness in a context of profound change, NATO must adapt deeply to remain necessary and relevant. To this end, the Alliance must assume a more significant role in promoting global stability, while remaining based on the permanent guarantee of the defence of the Allies.

Cooperation between the two shores of the Atlantic remains vital, and the E.U.'s empowerment within a framework of great mutual collaboration is a fundamental guarantee for the Allied success. In a century marked by the growing affirmation of autocratic powers, it becomes capital to reinforce the dual nature of NATO - in the political protection of allied democracies and the defence of the entire Euro-Atlantic area.

The high synchronisation between aggression in cyberspace and the projection of mass disinformation, denounce new strategic symbioses characteristic of hybrid wars and low-intensity conflicts that exploit the vulnerabilities of Open Societies, in a principle of undeclared political war. Timely and factual strategic communication has become central to NATO.

The present threats and the emerging disruptive new technologies demand more than a simple reinforcement of the Alliance's cardinal policies. The modernisation of processes, Space, Artificial Intelligence, and the Cyber Domain will be the core competencies of an organisation focused on the protection of a sustainable and democratic future for the Allies.

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